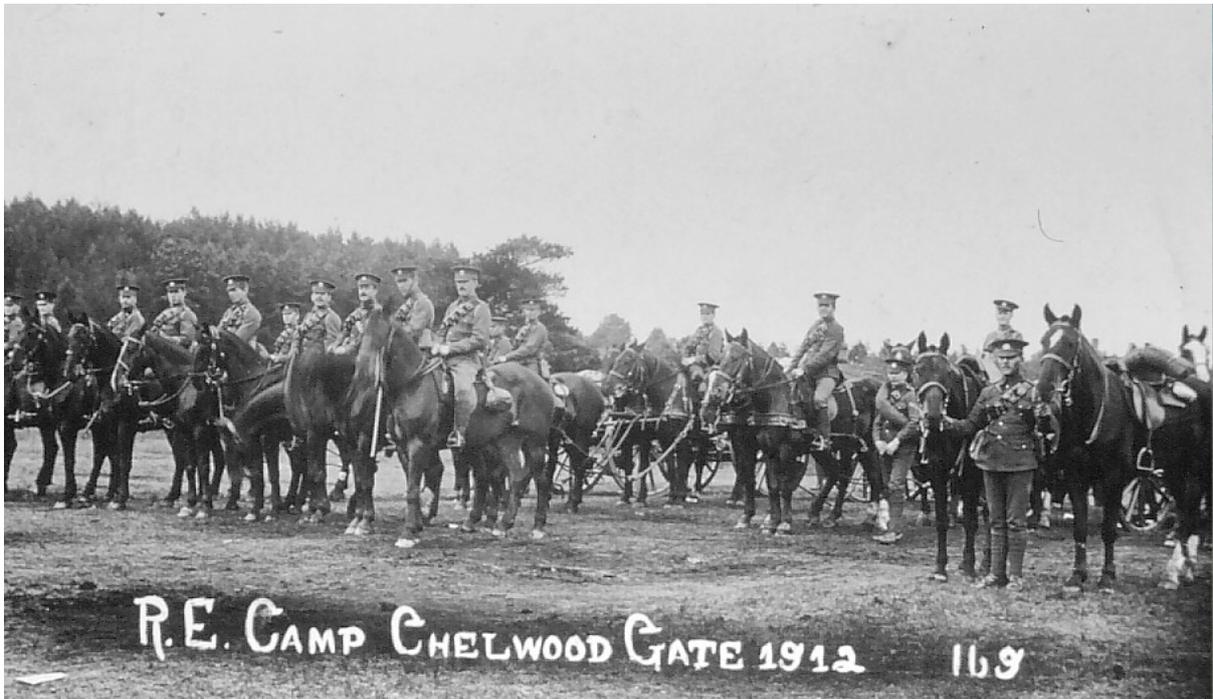


## Kitchener's Cavalry at Searles, Fletching

It is always interesting to find new material for a topic of interest and 'Kitchener's Cavalry' is no exception. When an item has been completed and published invariably new information comes to light. Having recently been given access to more photographs in Phil Lucas' archive we are able to give evidence of the men and their horses on the forest. One special photo has a local man, mounted. Read more about him on our Burial Ground project. It is tempting to suggest our Riding Officer being in one or two photos.

This topic began when excerpts from a diary were found published in the 1930's in Sussex County Magazine, written by GE Collins. His career as Purchasing Officer of Remounts in Lewes began 18 months before the outbreak of WW1. Many of the postcards in the collection have a 1912 date. It is tempting to suggest from the nature of his diary that the well-ordered camp was very much part of his doing. Having joined the Royal Field Artillery, he went on to command the divisional Riding Establishment at Nutley. Deemed unfit for active duty he continued with special responsibility for horses.



I would like to think Our Man is the chap standing far right between two mounts.

The collecting station for locally sourced horses was at the cattle market in Lewes. (*Does anyone have a photo of the market c 1912/15?*)

Mr G M Maryon-Wilson, of Searles in Fletching, offered his riding school for the benefit of the division stationed in Nutley. (This photo of riding School 2021).

Here, those recruits without previous riding experience, were to be taught the rudiments of equestrianism.

Daily, the novice riders received elementary instruction.



The more advanced equestrians among them underwent squadron drill. Road exercise was included and often the open space of the forest was utilised. Specific tasks were set for covering rough ground. A packet of 'fags' being the reward for the first one home.



Meanwhile, in the riding school at Searles, Beginner lessons would be underway.

First – at walk. This occupied some time.

Proceeding to Mount – from either side.

Moving onto Vaulting a stationary steed. Eventually, the daring manoeuvre of vaulting on to a moving horse.

This equestrian education took some weeks.

Occasionally different recruits appeared at odd times having, apparently, missed out on Lesson no 1 (and maybe 2,3, 4 and 5!).

The first thing to remember is that the horsemen had to travel from the forest at Chelwood Gate/Nutley area to the Riding School. Possibly down Bell Lane where, as nervous beginners, they had to navigate down the steep lane near Alchornes then up the other side probably on very uneven country lane surface, before arriving at their destination. Enough to give absolute beginners the jitters.

One morning on their way to the Riding School at Searles the company were trotting down from Nutley when the order 'Halt in Front' passed down the column of riders. It reached the Divisional Commander at the head of the troop. A newly arrived corporal had parted company with his mount. The Officer made his way back down the column to enquire – "Hurt, corporal?" "All right, Sir".

The soldier then proceeded to remount with the wrong foot in the stirrup. Whether he found himself facing the horses' rump is not clear but you get the general idea. His companions kept straight faces until one of the men, taking pity on his hapless comrade, dismounted and gave him a 'leg-up'. The commanding Officer trotted away to the head of the column.

'Walk; March; Tr-r-ot!"

They had not gone far when "Halt at the front' reached the leading officer.

Once more the novice had parted from his steed in a similar fashion. This occurred several more times on the short ride. It must have seemed like an eternity to the hapless soldier.

On eventually arriving at their destination the officer in charge, obviously thinking of the apparently fruitless hours spent in the Riding School, enquired with biting sarcasm 'Have you ever ridden a horse before, corporal?"

The unfortunate, and somewhat bruised, soldier looked at the officer in astonishment and answered in a mystified voice, "No, Sir".

Until that morning he had spent his time in an office until it occurred to someone, he ought to have a bit of riding practice.

*Continues next page*

# Mounted Brigade Transport and Supply Columns

When the new Territorial Force came into existence in April 1908 it included fourteen Mounted Brigades. Each included a Transport and Supply Column which was a mounted unit of the Army Service Corps. Each column was made up of a single company, a small unit consisting of 4 officers and 77 men.



From the "Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News" of 19 February 1916, men of the 2/1st Eastern Mounted Brigade's Transport and Supply Column in training

## 2. Tales of Kitchener's Cavalry at Searles, Fletching

Remember the unfortunate trooper who involuntary dismounted on his way from the forest to Searles? In time he became a reasonably proficient horseman. How unusual was a compassionate Riding Officer? Recruits had many a tumble. At least within the confines of the riding school they had a reasonably soft landing in a confined area.

The dirt surface of the school had hard wear, giving rise to permanent dust clouds. This, in turn, lead to many horses and riders sustaining eye problems. Looking at the photo of the horses in line shows how well they were being looked after.



Our horse master cast his mind around for ways of making the school more 'User Friendly'. He decided to approach the 'Powers That Be' for a supply of timber shavings it being obvious to him that his company was situated in a very well forested area therefore there must be wood shavings aplenty. Back came the reply to his request that there were no shavings to be had for miles and there would be no supplies for him.

In the course of going about his business and being an observant person he had noted that at Sheffield Park railway station there was an extremely large and productive timber yard.

This yard is actually a few stops up the line at Kingscote but was as close as I could find. It does indicate the volume of timber awaiting processing and despatch and this from one small country station between the wars, I believe.

Apart from the actual lengths of timber there was a massive by-product in the form of wood shavings. Just what he needed. He duly paid a visit to the station timber yard and, seeking out a likely chap, enquired whether he could acquire several loads of shavings/sawdust.

This elicited the response: 'Well. Now. I'm not so sure about that. I don't have the transport available. However, if you supply your own wagons and load them you can have it for 1/- a load.' How many wagons?

How many shillings? Our hero demurred and departed without an agreement being made. He allowed some days to elapse before he duly returned, with wagons and men, and, in an organised, quiet, efficient manner loaded up his transport without calling attention to their activity. He and his men + wagons + wood shavings then withdrew in an orderly fashion—without parting with any shillings. This became a regular venture and there is no mention of any money changing hands. Our officer was indeed a compassionate man for I'm sure both



horses and riders benefited from this exercise, especially if the riding surface was regular dampened.

I'm sure we are all familiar with the story and film 'War Horse' and the requisitioning of horses for WW1 and the heartbreak this engendered. Acquisition of horses was our officers priority but in his memoirs there were many ways in which the regulations could be interpreted .....

But that's another story.

### 3. Tales of Kitchener's Cavalry at Searles, Fletching

Our man had been appointed purchasing officer for the Lewes area. Contrary to the belief, then and now, that the government requisitioned animals and vehicles without recompense all were supposed to be purchased. Invariably this did not always happen but our chap paid £5 on top of the agreed price if the removal of a horse would cause a severe problem. His authorisation warrant was signed in August at Lewes in 1914. This warrant also allowed him to acquire any necessary harness and vehicles. This officer also gave a day's notice to enable the owner to complete any business and bring the horse back to the collecting yards at Lewes market the following day.

The type of horses/ponies were varied. These photos from the DPHS archive.



This looks like The Mile Straight with two very well looked after horses.  
The photograph (next Page) was taken along Birch Grove.



One independent dealer in the area made agreements with horse owners on his own. It came to our man's ears that he was keeping his purchases hidden in order to ship them out by a different collecting officer with whom he had made a convenient arrangement resulting in his receiving a higher price for the animals. Having got wind of this our hero stationed himself at the window of The White Hart in Lewes High Street with a good view of passing traffic. Eventually, the trader appeared with five very suitable horses en route for the cattle market. With the aid of a nearby constable the horses were duly requisitioned. There were many and varied incidents.

At another location the gentleman of the house walked up an infirm family pony and was caught out when a companion horse neighed from a shed, some small distance away. This proved a very suitable mount and was duly acquired.

Other reluctant owners included one elderly gentleman who declared his horse was essential as his Lady wished to be taken out for a drive in the afternoons. I imagine the equipage looked very similar to this.



Like all Collecting Officers our man had his daily target to reach. However, if there were two animals, he would take only one. Many owners were resigned to their horses being taken, but saw this as one way in which they could do 'Their Bit'. Others were not always so willing. One man, a market gardener, was adamant that to lose his horse would make life difficult in the extreme. His only other means of transport being a particularly old pony. It would

mean hardship for the pony as well as himself. If our officer had any other option he would have left the market gardener alone, but he had not. The problem could not be resolved. The horse owner regretfully complied whereupon he enquired whether the officer like apples? He did and the gardener handed over his horse and a basket of delicious eating apples.

He had his reward. Later, when the horse in question was trotted up for inspection, our officer learned the vet had declared him unsound whereupon he was returned to a very grateful owner and resumed his life on the market garden.

There were some happy endings, albeit one is suspicious of the onset lameness.